

News Release



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STATE PARKS RANGER, LIFEGUARD CAPTURE CHILD RAPE SUSPECT

SANTA BARBARA – A state park ranger and a state park lifeguard chased and then apprehended a Massachusetts fugitive after he exposed himself at Carpinteria State Beach Monday evening, California Parks Director Rusty Areias announced today. The man is wanted for drugging and raping six young girls in the Boston area and was the subject of a nationwide manhunt.

Ranger Jane Hall and Lifeguard Grif Hutton arrested the suspect after a foot chase. Neither the suspect nor the officers were injured. Hutton was on loan from the lifeguard division to serve as a patrol ranger.

“This incident once again demonstrates the challenges our rangers face on a daily basis,” said Areias. “They are more than stewards of our natural resources – although they are that. They are peace officers in the finest tradition of the profession, and can be called upon at any moment to put their lives on the line for the safety of the public.

“I congratulate Ranger Hall and Lifeguard Hutton for their quick thinking and good work in the arrest of this suspected child molester,” Areias said.

Steffani Jarrett, Chief Ranger for the area, said, “This is the kind of thing that happens on a regular basis for our rangers, except in this case it turned out to be somebody we really wanted to apprehend.”

The incident began after Ranger Hall received a report that a man was exposing himself on the beach at the upper end of Carpinteria State Beach. They confronted the man, identified him as Peter M. Gagnon, 48, of Northridge, Mass., and were in the process of checking with the State Parks dispatch center for any possible criminal warrants when Gagnon, a 220-pound ex-Marine, fled on foot.

(more)

The officers gave chase, following Gagnon into an apartment complex outside the park. When the suspect ran into a parking lot of the apartment complex, he was cornered by Lifeguard Hutton. Hall then hand-cuffed the suspect.

Massachusetts authorities have been seeking Gagnon's arrest since he fled his home May 19. They were in the process of producing a segment for the nationally broadcast "America's Most Wanted" television show to seek the public's help in apprehending him. Federal authorities had already been asked to aid in the search.

According to news reports in Massachusetts, Gagnon was indicted by a Worcester County grand jury in May on 80 charges, including raping a child and drugging a person for the purpose of sex. Authorities learned of the case when Gagnon's daughter contacted them after reportedly discovering video tapes of her father drugging and raping six female victims, age 10-to-14 years old, over a five-month period beginning last year.

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